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SUBJECT: Allegations of LTTE Chemical Weapons Capability

REF: COLOMBO 1241

Classified By: ISN/CB Office Director Robert Mikulak,  
reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (U) Background.

1A. (S) Ref reported on a document the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister passed to the U.S. Charge reporting that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had made an attempt (in 2002) to procure "Red Mercury," a chemical claimed to be used to manufacture weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The document also identifies a U.S. chemical company in California as the possible manufacturer of this chemical. The Foreign Minister said his government is extremely concerned by the report and asked that the United States provide "technical assistance" in dealing with the report.

1B. (U) Red Mercury is a well-known scam material, frequently purported to be important in the manufacture of nuclear weapons but having no applications in the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction, conventional explosives, or any weapons system despite the claims about its alleged properties. It has been utilized by con-artists throughout the world in scams targeting terrorist organizations and rogue states desiring WMD capabilities. Although numerous reports from U.S. and Russian experts have stated that the existence of Red Mercury is a hoax, contradictory comments from other Russian scientists and various inflammatory television shows and books have helped perpetuate the myth, and Red Mercury continues to be sought by ignorant entities seeking to acquire WMD.

12. (S-Rel Sri Lanka) In response to request in paragraph 3 of Ref, Embassy Colombo may advise Sri Lanka that Washington has no credible information that "Red Mercury" is a WMD threat and is unable to identify or locate the U.S. chemical company specified in the Sri Lankan report. Given these factors, we deem the sources cited in the document not to be credible and believe that there is nothing to be concerned about in regard to this report.

13. (S-Rel Sri Lanka) However, it should be noted that there have been illicit trafficking cases where documentation citing Red Mercury has accompanied authentic nuclear material. So although the Sri Lankan report has been assessed to be a scam, all reports of nuclear smuggling should be thoroughly investigated in order to rule out the existence of any material that could be a threat. Embassy should ask Sri Lanka to continue to share similar reports in the future.

RICE